

**\*Please note additional agenda item under Executive Session. Item added after legal ad was published in the Cranston Herald on Thursday, May 8, 2008.**

**CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2008**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: 6:00 P.M.**

**IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY PUBLIC MEETING**

**IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY PUBLIC WORK SESSION**

**WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING (REED CONFERENCE ROOM)**

**845 PARK AVENUE**

**MINUTES**

**A special meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at the William A. Briggs Building in the Reed Conference Rom with the following members present: Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi, Mr. Stycos, Mr. Traficante, and Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway. Mr. Archetto was absent. Also present were Mr. Scherza, Mr. Nero, Mr. Votto, Mr. Balducci, Mr. Laliberte, and Attorneys Ben Scungio and Ronald Cascione.**

**The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. It was moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that the members adjourn to Executive Session Pursuant to RI State Laws PL**

**42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel \*(Administrators' Contracts) and PL  
42-46-5(a)(2) Contract and Litigation (Possible Litigation – Caruolo  
Action.)**

**Chair Pro Tem Iannazzi reconvened public session at 6:37 p.m.**

**The Roll was called.**

## **I. Adjourn to Public Work Session**

### **1. Proposed Amendments to Soliciting Prices (Bids and Quotations) Policy**

**Mr. Balducci indicated to the committee that they had received a proposed language change to the Bids and Quotation Policy along with a copy of the present policy. A survey was attached that was conducted out of his office. He explained that he has wanted to make this change for several years. Currently the policy reads that any item more than \$2,000 needs to go out to formal bid, and then that purchase is placed before the School Committee for approval. He would like to bump up that dollar figure to \$3,000 in order to allow his office that between \$2,000 and \$3,000 they will seek quotes, and then anything over \$3,000 will continue to follow the bid procedure. With regard to the school districts that did respond to his question, most of them, as far as**

the formal bid is concerned, have \$5,000. The reason for this amount is due to the fact that it is state law. If districts go out to bid for something over \$5,000 they are required to follow the formal bid process. Some districts are under that amount. Smithfield is actually \$10,000.

Mr. Traficante asked Mr. Balducci what his thought process was behind this request. Mr. Balducci responded that as an example he referred to the Transportation area. Because of the need to purchase replacement equipment items that are necessary to repair, if it is over \$2,000 then it holds up the process where they have to go out to bid, get a price, and then get the work done. He is looking to make this change in order to be more efficient. In an emergency situation, they do have the latitude to purchase an item. The language reads that there is a sub-committee which consists of the Chairman of the School Committee, the Superintendent of Schools, and himself sign off with proper rationale why they are bypassing the bid process. He believed that the district would be saving money on advertising as well because they wouldn't have to advertise as often by going to a different threshold.

Mrs. Greifer asked if there was anything in the City Charter, and Mr. Balducci responded that he had asked Attorney Cascione to look at the City Charter. He and Mr. Cascione are of the opinion that there is

nothing in the City Charter which would preclude the district from doing this.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway mentioned that Transportation has had spending control issues. She asked if this new policy would enhance controlling, and, if so, how when this is an area of concern right now. Mr. Scherza responded that the committee received the auditor's report, and there wasn't one negative comment regarding the fiscal controls. To the contrary, there have been many dozens on the city side. The management letters have said that the district has consistent management controls. To advertise in the Providence Journal for a bid can cost as much as \$700. A \$2,000 item now can cost \$2,700.

Mr. Stycos and Mr. Nero left the work session to attend the Cranston High School East Academic Convocation. The time was 6:43 p.m.

Mr. Traficante asked that if there was a line item in the Transportation Department and it was exceeded for an emergency repair where would the money be taken from. Mr. Balducci indicated that an account outside of that area would help to support that overage in Transportation. He said that utilities are a good example, and he can't go to another line item for a particular school because the rest of their line items are salaries. He would go outside of that location to help pay for that overage on their utility account. Normally the budget revision document would come before the School Committee

with all the explanations of the pluses and minuses for their approval.

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Mr. Balducci explained that he didn't go up to the \$5,000 limit because he believes that there is still money to be saved at the \$3,000 limit. If he asks vendors to give him a written quote, the vendors will not put in the time and effort to sharpen their pencils to give the district a good price. If the ad is in the newspaper, the vendors know the district is serious. If the item is under \$3,000, it is not required that he get a verbal quote but has the option to do that. Between \$2,000 and \$3,000, he will have to have a written quote. Most of the time, depending upon the items, his office will use the same vendor because he knows they are reliable. He knows their prices are good to begin with because his office wouldn't be using them if they didn't feel their prices were competitive.

## **2. Special Education School Support Visit Presentation**

Mr. Laliberte presented Mr. David Sienko, Education Specialist from the RI Department of Education, who is a liaison for Cranston Public Schools. Recently he led a team from the state department in the area of special education for a system visit. He also led the team five

**years ago.**

**A copy of Mr. Sienko's report is attached for the record. A copy of his report is available in the Cranston School Committee office.**

**Mr. Sienko indicated that he is with the Office of Diverse Learners at the RI Department of Education. His office is responsible for special education, early childhood education, English language education, and learning beyond grade level which use to be called gifted and talented. As the district liaison, Mr. Sienko works with a number of districts on all special education matters. If a parent calls the Department of Education and has an early childhood question related to special education, they would handle it. Last year they created the Call Center to handle parent calls and inquiries from the district. This has been a great invention. It is streamlining getting back to people quickly. Many times it is a matter of miscommunication and people not knowing what their options are. It has been a very good tool for them.**

**They are also assigned to a number of functions within the agency. He works on the high school reform team as well as the specialization within special education. He handles secondary transition also.**

**He was asked to come to Cranston to share the results of their most recent school support visit. He briefly explained the school support process. It is required in the federal regulations every five years that**

they monitor the local school districts for compliance with special education laws and regulations. It is called the Focused Monitoring Visit so they are looking at special education in the context of what they are doing for all kids. They can't keep it in isolation because it is so embedded in all the

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work that is done for the kids in the district. This process involves a data analysis meeting looking at how schools are performing, what the strategic plans are for the schools, and how they are meeting those goals. The district then provides presentation and states what they have been working on since the last visit and the things they are improving on. They then verify this information with an on-site visit to look for evidence that these things are happening. Subsequently, the district receives a report with the initial findings, and with that report they sit down with the district leadership to craft a support plan. This report is available on the Department of Education website as well. Once the report is done and the support plan is written, it is sent to the Superintendent and two days later it is publicly released.

Mr. Sienko went on to say that there are two types of items in the report. There are performance items which are things within the scope and responsibility of the laws and regulations. However, there are things that they would suggest for areas of improvement or continued focus and effort. There are compliance items which are

items that are not currently consistent with federal regulations.

Mr. Sienko commented that he likes Cranston Public Schools and has been assigned to this district since he came to the Department of Education a little over eight years ago. He noted that there are very few compliance issues in Cranston. This district is very responsive to requests called into his office. There are some very good things going on in Cranston. Mr. Traficante commented that this is due to the excellent leadership of Mr. Norman Laliberte.

Mr. Sienko highlighted the School Support Visit Report. Five years ago he saw some of the things that Cranston was working on then and has seen some of the things that they are working on now. It is nice to see that growth over time. They took some of the recommendations five years ago and applied them. It is very clear, and many districts are looking to Cranston as a model, on the approach this district has taken in terms of educating all children. There is clearly an all children agenda here. It is illustrated at the administrative level with the structure that has been created with the two executive directors. It is an inclusion model administratively and structurally. The model is also seen at the high schools as well. There are a lot of districts looking to Cranston because Cranston is using the special education leader at the building level as an assistant principal and not a department chair. There are lots of districts looking at that and asking how it was done. They are interested in replicating that model. In the two high schools, those



two assistant principals are viewed as part of the leadership team of the district and part of the leadership team in the building. They are a part of making decisions about curriculum, instruction, scheduling, and things that affect all kids. He couldn't tell the committee how significant this is as a high school person that this person has that kind of clout in the building to make things happen for kids. Cranston has modeled this at the administrative level as well as at the building level, and the people get that it is all about the kids.

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The team also found this in the unified curriculum and instruction. There are a lot of scaffolded opportunities, and a lot of evidence in the schools that this is in place. The district is providing intervention, and they are measuring the students responding to that treatment; and the schools and the district have been very aggressive being a part of that. The district has trainers in the district who are being used as trainers for other districts throughout the state. A lot of kids are included in settings that in other districts they are not. One of the major changes the team saw since 2002 is the number of district operated alternative programs. When they visited in 2002, the Sanders Program was under one year old at that point. The district now has Sanders, Horton, and the wonderfully integrated pre-school program which didn't exist in 2002. The district has the Alternative Education Program and the Alternative Interim Program and the Transition Program. The district has a lot of nice alternatives that are

very inclusion oriented that are focused on kids getting the treatment they need in the district and getting them back to their education as quickly as possible. If one were to look at this on a national issue, more and more districts are doing this nationally. The State Directors for Special Education have done some focus studies on this trend to provide more of these services within the district. The major motivation is money that they can do it for less and more effectively, but there are a lot of collateral benefits that come along with that. They are increasing the district's capacity to meet the needs of a variety of kids, kids with social and emotional learning needs that they use to send out of district and now are educated in district, and there is the advantage of having a school psychologist and psychiatrist available to consult with the comprehensive schools as well. They are seeing this trend nationally and in Rhode Island, and Cranston has been innovative at pursuing this.

Mr. Sienko asked the committee to keep in mind that the district has a very strong professional development infrastructure in the district. One of the things that people are struggling with is how to better connect the professional development with the needs they see in the district. The district does have the infrastructure; now the key is focusing on the content. People need to deliver these services effectively. They saw good evidence of family engagement and multiple opportunities in all the schools for families to become involved and engage in the schools. The parents they interviewed as part of the visit have very positive things to say about the staff and

**the staff's responsiveness when they called and asked questions. They felt that teachers were calling them before things happened, and they truly appreciated it.**

**Mr. Sienko referred to the Early Development Learning Program which is aligned with the early learning standards in the State, and it is out in front of a lot of districts in terms of that development. It has helped with the effective transition for kids who may need extra supports moving from pre-school into the school system.**

**Mr. Sienko mentioned that there is a good connection with the career and technical education. They met a lot of kids who are getting service there, and that is good to see.**

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**Cranston is one of the few districts that has guidance counselors at every IEP meeting, and that is significant. They can bring a lot of value and information to the table.**

**Mr. Sienko asked the committee to keep in mind professional development aligned with the district performance measures as an area and how the professional development offerings are tightened up to align with where the gaps are in the district. They did look at transition practices at the Cranston West, and it is an area the district is starting to pay attention to. Kids with significantly more disabilities**

for the first time are being educated at Cranston West; in the past they were all sent to East. There is some infrastructure and support that has to go with that. The team gave them some suggestions in this area. They noted some things at the New England Laborers' Charter School, and there is a definite increase in the number of students with special needs attending there. The district has already made some changes to make sure the kids are getting what they need to be successful at the Charter School.

With regard to cultural competence, this district is experiencing a huge difference in the population and the demographics, particularly kids who don't learn in English as their primary language. Many districts are struggling with how to provide the appropriate assessments and interventions for those kids, and he encouraged the district to look at those assessments for kids particularly in their native languages in providing those supports.

The issues were minor, and many were paperwork issues. He told the committee that the district has made a significant commitment to provide the administrative structure to provide access for all kids. It is clear from the administration level, building level, and the classroom level. There is a consistent message and vision for inclusion through the system. There is strong evidence of research based practice in the classrooms. The knowledge of the special education staff in terms of procedures and the practices for effective special education intervention seem to be well established in the

**district. There is a clear commitment to educating all the children in the least restrictive setting, and that is what IDEA is about; it is educating children in their neighborhood schools with their friends in the places they want to be and the places where the district can best meet their needs. Keeping the kids in district with some of the alternative programs is another step in that process of ensuring that the kids get what they need, and they can be educated here in the City of Cranston.**

**It is a good report. His department does fifteen of these throughout the year, and it was a pleasure. He has a lot of districts where there is a lot of work to do.**

**Mr. Archetto joined the work session at 7:00 p.m.**

**Mr. Laliberte indicated that the Department of Education allows the district to write a grant to help to continue to support the schools in their attempts to educate all children.**

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**He believed he received \$26,000 that he can apply for, and he will apply for the \$26,000 to bring professional development to the teachers.**

**Moved by Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway, seconded by Mrs. Greifer and**

**unanimously carried to suspend adjourning public session in order to return to Executive Session.**

**Chair Pro Tem Iannazzi reconvened public session at 9:42 p.m.**

## **II. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – May 14, 2008**

**Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mrs. Greifer and unanimously carried that the May 14, 2008 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.**

## **III. Adjournment**

**Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mrs. Greifer and unanimously carried that the meeting be adjourned.**

**There being no further business to come before the meeting, it was adjourned at  
9:43 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Andrea M. Iannazzi**

**Clerk**